

**REASONS FOR COHABITATION AND RELATIONSHIP QUALITY ACROSS THE TRANSITION TO
PARENTHOOD**

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine how the reasons for cohabitation affect relationship quality across the transition to parenthood. Mothers and fathers from a sample of 124 dual-earner couples participated in a variety of activities that helped measure their relationship quality as well as their reasons for moving in together. The reasons couples gave for moving in together were classified into two categories: internal reasons and external reasons. The couples completed surveys about the reasons they moved in with their partner and their satisfaction with their relationship.

This study sought to answer the following research question: Do cohabiting couples who cite internal reasons for cohabitation weather the transition to parenthood better than cohabiting couples who cite external reasons? I hypothesized that couples who cite internal reasons will have a stronger base for their relationship and will weather the transition to parenthood better than couples who cite external reasons.

After analyzing the data, I found that couples who cited internal reasons for cohabitation did not weather the transition to parenthood any better than couples who cited external reasons. Both internal and external reasons were at some point associated with less relationship quality. This then suggests that there is not a single reason that couples should consider before moving in together.

RELATIONSHIP QUALITY AND NEW REASONS FOR COHABITATION AMONG NEW PARENTS

Previous research on the reasons for cohabitation (two people who live together and have an emotional/sexual relationship without being married) found that childless cohabitators report a variety of reasons for moving in together including to “spend more time together” and to “test drive” the relationship (Rhoades, Stanley, & Markman, 2009). Previous qualitative research on cohabiting couples with children found that most cohabiting parents began cohabiting in response to a pregnancy – essentially a “shotgun cohabitation” – and report that living together makes it easier to co-parent and share living expenses (Reed, 2006). It has previously been found that more external reasons to live together are negative for relationship quality, and more internal reasons are positive. However, the role of reasons for living together has not been examined in conjunction with the change in relationship quality across the transition to parenthood. I seek to examine the role of the reasons for cohabitation in serving as a protective factor in the change in relationship quality across the transition to parenthood. Do couples that live together because of they want to spend more time together tend to decline less in relationship quality as compared to couples that live together to “test” the relationship? I outline below the state of the literature in these areas, and hypothesize that internal reasons for cohabiting will be protective and these couples will decline less in relationship quality, whereas couples that have external reasons for cohabiting will decline further in relationship quality across the transition to parenthood.

Relationship Quality Across the Transition to Parenthood

Adding a new child to the family requires both the family and the relationship between the mother and father to change. Research overwhelmingly shows that marital quality decreases across the transition to parenthood (Belsky, Spanier, & Rovine, 1983). However, the degree to which the quality of the relationship declines is not the same for all couples. Parents who make more positive evaluations of their relationship before the baby arrives generally make more positive evaluations after the infants first year of life (Belsky et al., 1983). Also, enduring vulnerabilities of the couple (lower education level, history of cohabitation) have been reported

to increase parents' levels of stress and result in a decreased level of adaptability after the baby is born (Kluwer, & Johnson, 2007). Following this logic, cohabiting couples' reasons for cohabitation may influence their relationship quality across the transition to parenthood.

Whereas cohabiting couples are generally at a greater risk for dissatisfaction, Rhoades et al. (2009) found that the reasons couples choose to cohabit is associated with the quality of their relationship. Couples who reported cohabiting to test their relationship had more negative communication interactions, had higher levels of physical aggression, and had lower relationship satisfaction than couples who cohabited because they wanted to spend more time together or to become more intimate. Couples who cohabited because of testing or because it was convenient also showed lower levels of confidence and dedication than couples who reported cohabiting because they wanted to spend more time with their partner or wanted to achieve a greater level of intimacy (Rhoades et al., 2009). Couples who moved in together because of a pregnancy were shown by Reed (2006) to describe their relationship as tenuous after the baby was born and cite instances of infidelity, mistrust and jealousy as some of their biggest problems.

Reasons for Cohabitation as Predictors of Relationship Quality across the Transition to Parenthood

Cohabitation grew in popularity in the latter part of the twentieth century and continues to do so. However, the strength and stability of these unofficial unions has come under fire in recent years. Research has shown that the transition into cohabitation for many couples is often unplanned and simply "happens" (Lindsay, 2000). Current research also suggests that cohabitation puts couples at a greater risk for dissatisfaction because they lack the mutual commitment enjoyed by married couples (Rhoades et al., 2009). Cohabiting couples have been found to show more conflict, less communication and commitment, feel less secure in their relationships, and encounter more infidelity than do married couples (Reed, 2006).

Research has shown that births to cohabiting couples have grown from 6% of all births in 1980 to 15% of all births in 2000 (Reed, 2006) and according to the Centers for Disease Control

and Prevention, as of 2007 four out of every ten births in the United States were to unwed mothers (NCHS Pressroom, 2009). The transition to parenthood can be a strenuous time for couples in terms of the quality of their relationship with one another. Couples are able to devote less time to the relationship and stress levels are generally higher (especially for first time parents) as they must adapt to new priorities and schedules (Doss, Rhoades, Stanley, & Markman, 2009). Reed showed that many cohabitators with a new baby experience severe problems in their relationships. These problems include infidelity, mistrust and jealousy, frequent arguments, substance abuse, jail, and domestic violence (Reed, 2006). Many of these cohabitators viewed cohabitation as a way to spend time with and take care of their child, but they still had the option to leave if they became unsatisfied.

We know that the transition to parenthood has been shown to challenge couples' relationships (Kluwer & Johnson, 2007). We also know that some cohabiting couples are at a higher risk for problems than others before a baby even enters the situation (Rhoades et al., 2009). This begs the question: Do the reasons cohabiting couples give as to why they initially moved in together ultimately affect the quality of their relationship across the transition to parenthood? For example, do couples who moved in together for convenience or to test their relationship ultimately suffer more than couples who moved in to become closer to each other or because they simply reject the institution of marriage?

These questions are of great importance because they could help explain why some cohabiting couples have an easier transition to parenthood than others. These findings would also be important so that people who may be thinking about cohabitating and having a baby may know more of what to expect based on their own reasons for moving in together.

Whereas some research has focused on the reasons for cohabitation and their association with relationship quality, no research has compared internal versus external reasons that couples give for moving in together and how that affects the quality of the relationship across the transition to parenthood. The internal reasons for cohabitation are drawn from the concept of the

internal locus of control (Rotter, 1966). An individual with an internal locus of control believes their own successes and failures in life are a result of their own choices, behaviors, efforts, and abilities. The external reasons for cohabitation are drawn from the external locus of control literature. A person who uses an external locus of control believes that their successes and failures are a result of luck, fate, or something else beyond their control. Researchers like Lawrence, Rothman, Cobb, Rothman, and Bradbury (2008) have shown that regardless of whether couples are cohabiting or not, relationship satisfaction and quality decline across the transition to parenthood. The possible reasons they give for the decline in quality are the degree to which the pregnancy was planned (with more planned pregnancies resulting in higher quality), and satisfaction with the relationship prior to the pregnancy (with more satisfied couples experiencing a steeper decline in quality). The transition to parenthood is believed to intensify relationship problems that already existed during pregnancy (Kluwer & Johnson, 2007).

The reasons I have deemed internal reasons for cohabitating, following Rhoades et al. (2009), are reasons like wanting to spend more time together, or planning on marrying at a later date. The external reasons I have identified include moving in because it was convenient, financial reasons, testing the relationship, or because of a baby or pregnancy. By examining internal and external reasons for cohabiting, I may be able to predict how the quality of the relationship will change based on the reasons for cohabitation.

Thus, I predict that couples who choose to cohabit for external reasons, perhaps beyond their control, such as finances or because of a baby (that may have been unplanned) will have a greater decline in relationship quality and functioning than couples who choose to cohabit for internal reasons such as to spend more time together, who were more likely in control when they decided to move in with their partner.

Hypotheses.

1. Respondents whose primary reason for cohabitation was because of internal reasons such as spending more time together because they enjoyed the relationship are

hypothesized to have a firmer base for their relationship. These respondents will decline less in relationship quality across the transition to parenthood in comparison with respondents whose primary reason to cohabit was not to spend more time together.

2. Respondents whose primary reason for cohabitation was because of external reasons (convenience, finances, having a baby, testing the relationship) are hypothesized to have a weaker base for their relationship. The enjoyment of the relationship was not a factor in the decision to live together for these respondents, so they will not weather the transition to parenthood as well when compared to respondents whose primary reason was to spend more time together because again, other factors propelled them to cohabitate other than their individual enjoyment in the relationship.

Method

Sample This study uses the New Parents Project data, a sample of 182 dual-earner couples from the metropolitan area of a large Midwestern city who were expecting their first child. The criteria for inclusion were (1) married or with partner full-time; (2) 18 years of age; (3) expecting their first child; (4) able to read and speak English; (5) currently employed full-time and expecting to work at least part-time by the time the infant was 3 months of age; and (6) planning to stay in the study area for at least one year. Couples were recruited through flyers, internet, newspaper, and movie ads, doctors' offices, childbirth education classes, and word of mouth. The participants are assessed during pregnancy (Phase 1) and at 3 (Phase 2), 6 (Phase 3), and 9 (Phase 4) months postpartum. This study uses the sub-sample of the main sample that were either 1) currently cohabiting with their partner or 2) cohabited with their partner prior to marriage ($n = 124$ mothers, 125 fathers).

Procedures Eligible couples are sent links to online surveys (Phase 1 only) or are mailed packets with paper questionnaires. Links or questionnaires are sent in the third trimester of pregnancy, and at Phases 2, 3, and 4, about two weeks before the designated data collection point.

Variables

Independent Variable: Reasons for cohabitation scale The reasons for cohabitation scale is a modified version of the Rhoades et al. (2009) questionnaire that included 38 questions and 6 subscales aimed at assessing why couples began to live with their partner prior to marriage (see appendix for the scale). The scale is administered at Phase 4 of the study. The original Rhoades et al. measure included subscales related to 1) testing the relationship (because I want to make sure we are compatible before deciding about marriage), 2) convenience (because we were spending most nights together anyway), and 3) spending time together (so that we could have more daily intimacy and sharing). This questionnaire was expanded to also include subscales related to 4) planning (because we got engaged), 5) because of the baby (because we both wanted to live with the baby), and 6) financial reasons (to share household expenses). Respondents report how much they agreed or disagreed with each item on a seven point scale anchored at “strongly disagree” and “strongly agree”.

There were some questions from the reasons for cohabitation scale that were omitted in our analysis of cohabiting couples. Questions like, “because no religious beliefs hindered my decision to live with my partner” or “because if I lived with my partner it would be easier to check up on him/her” did not seem to fit well into any of the six subscales (spending more time together, planning, convenience, financial, testing or because of the baby), and therefore did not factor into our analysis.

Dependent Variable: Relationship satisfaction The Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS) is used to assess relationship satisfaction and is a self-report measure of relationship adjustment (Spanier, 1976). I use the three item version that has shown predictive validity (Sabourin, Valois, & Lussier, 2005). Respondents report how often in their relationship they agree or disagree with each item on a six point scale anchored at “never” and “all of the time”.

Control variables I control for gender, age (in years), education (in years), race/ethnicity, marital status, and relationship duration, all measured at Phase 1. I also control for total household income at each phase.

Analytic Plan

In order to assess relationship quality across the transition to parenthood, scores on the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS) of mothers and fathers were subjected to a structural equation model. I used structural equation modeling because I sought to acquire both initial levels of relationship quality as well as the change in relationship quality across the transition to parenthood. Both the mothers' and fathers' trajectory contained a unique intercept (α) and slope (β). Models were estimated using AMOS. To account for missing data, we used full information maximum likelihood estimation (Muthén, Kaplan, & Hollis, 1987). Because there was substantial attrition by Wave 4, using the full information maximum likelihood estimation was necessary.

Following Kenny (2010) and Bollen and Curran (2006), I examined four fit indices including the chi-square (χ^2), which is non-significant in models with a good fit but is not always a reliable indicator as sample size increases. Thus, I also relied on the Tucker Lewis Index, also known as the Non-normed Fit Index (NNFI), and the Comparative Fit Index (CFI). A value between 0.90 and 0.95 is acceptable for both of these indices, and above 0.95 indicates a good fit. I also report the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) for which an acceptable value is below 0.08. I fit both the unconditional latent growth curve model (the model with no covariates or controls) as well as the full model. The unconditional latent growth curve model demonstrated adequate fit for both mothers and fathers, thus I ran the full model. The full model fit the data well for the fathers ($N = 125$, $\chi^2(21) = 25.27$, $p = .24$, NNFI = 0.98, CFI = 0.995, RMSEA = 0.04) and the mothers ($N = 124$, $\chi^2(21) = 40.52$, $p = .01$, NNFI = 0.97, CFI = 0.98, RMSEA = 0.087).

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics are reported in Table 1 for mothers and Table 2 for fathers. Overall, the mean level of self-reported relationship quality was high for both mothers and fathers, though both saw a slight drop after the birth of their child. About 75% of the sample were premarital cohabitators, and the average relationship duration of all couples in the study was just over four years. A majority of the sample was White and highly educated, with the average income hovering around \$80,000. On average, mothers were in their late twenties while fathers were in their early thirties. Overall, living together for reasons related to convenience was the most endorsed reason for initially moving in together, while living together because of the baby was the reason least reported by participants in this study. While convenience and the baby were the highest and lowest endorsed reasons respectively for both mothers and fathers, for mothers, the remaining reasons ranked as follows: planning, spending time together, financial, and testing the relationship. Similarly for fathers: spending time together, planning, financial, and testing the relationship were ranked in that order.

The fairly large numbers in the % missing column can be attributed to respondents marking “not applicable” on questions in that subscale. For example, respondents who are currently married but cohabited before marriage (78.51% of the sample) may have responded N/A to almost all questions on the *Because of the Baby* subscale. These percentages also reflect the substantial attrition experienced in this study. The DAS had low, but acceptable, alphas for both mothers and fathers in Phases 1 and 2, and for mothers only in Phase 4. The alphas for the Reasons for cohabitation scale were all above 0.70.

Table 1. *Descriptive statistics: Mothers*

Variable	M	SD	%	alpha	% missing
Phase 1 DAS	16.63	1.41		0.64	0.80
Phase 2 DAS	16.19	1.78		0.67	5.60
Phase 4 DAS	16.25	1.44		0.52	18.40
Time-invariant independent variables					
Planning	4.13	2.03		0.86	24.80
Time together	4.04	1.19		0.79	21.60
Testing	2.52	1.40		0.77	23.20
Financial	3.28	1.40		0.73	21.60
Because of the Baby	1.73	1.53		0.73	37.60
Convenience	4.54	1.70		0.94	22.40
Time-invariant control variables					
Marital status					
Premarital cohabitators			76.03		3.20
White/Caucasian			82.40		0
Less than college a degree			31.20		0
Mother's Age	28.83	4.25			2.40
Relationship Duration	4.17	2.91			4.00
Time-variant control variables					
Income	79983.21	44776.43			1.60
N	124				

Table 2. *Descriptive statistics: Fathers*

Variable	M	SD	%	alpha	% missing
Phase 1 DAS	16.41	1.49		0.66	4.80
Phase 2 DAS	15.88	1.65		0.57	5.60
Phase 4 DAS	15.75	1.82		0.71	20.00
Time-invariant independent variables					
Planning	4.11	1.99		0.82	24.80
Time together	4.12	1.03		0.70	24.80
Testing	2.88	1.31		0.70	27.20
Financial	3.47	1.37		0.73	25.60
Because of the Baby	1.96	1.46		0.67	44.80
Convenience	4.43	1.44		0.88	26.40
Time-invariant control variables					
Marital status					
Premarital cohabitators			78.51		3.20
White/Caucasian			86.18		1.60
Less than a college degree			41.13		0.80
Father's Age	30.33	4.78			0
Relationship Duration	4.26	2.97			5.60
Time-variant control variables					
Income	81773.31	43504.68			5.60
N	125				

Results

Results are reported in Tables 3 and 4, for mothers and fathers respectively.

Testing Relationship quality was found only to decrease further in fathers who reported living together to test the relationship. Mothers did not report any significant change in relationship quality.

Financial Inspection of the results for the financial subscale showed that fathers who cohabited because of financial reasons declined further in relationship quality. Mothers again did not report any significant change in relationship quality because of finances.

Convenience The results of the convenience subscale turned up a few interesting results. While mothers reported no significant change in relationship quality, fathers who reported cohabiting because it was convenient increased further in relationship quality after the birth of their first child.

Because of the baby Mothers who reported living together because of a baby declined further in their relationship quality, while fathers did not show any significant change in relationship quality across the transition to parenthood.

Planning Mothers who reported living together because they planned on getting married declined further in relationship quality. No significant results were found for fathers.

Time together The final measured subscale, time together, showed that mothers who reported living together in order to spend more time with their partner decreased further in their reported relationship quality after the birth of their child. Similarly, fathers who reported living cohabiting to spend more time together declined further in relationship quality at the intercept. However, these fathers increased significantly in their relationship quality over time.

Other There were a few other variables that proved to be significant for parents' relationship quality across the transition. In terms of demographic characteristics, white mothers' relationships increased in quality over time, and older fathers initially declined further in relationship quality. Mothers who originally cohabited with their partner but were currently married declined further in relationship quality over time, while currently married fathers had higher relationship quality initially.

Table 3. *Structural equation models of the association between the reasons for cohabitation and relationship quality: Mothers*

	Relationship Quality			
	Intercept (α)		Slope (β)	
	Un- standardized	S.E.	Un- standardized	S.E.
Intercept	16.26***	1.23	-0.24	0.62
Time-invariant independent variables				
Reasons for Cohabitation				
Testing	-0.18	0.13	0.04	0.06
Financial	0.11	0.13	-0.03	0.06
Convenience	-0.07	0.11	0.07	0.05
Because of the Baby	0.02	0.13	-0.12+	0.06
Planning	0.10	0.08	-0.07*	0.04
Time Together	-0.28+	0.17	-0.01	0.08
Time-invariant control variables				
Mother's age	-0.05	0.04	0.03	0.02
Mother's education				
Less than a college degree	0.01	0.29	-0.12	0.15
Mother's race/ethnicity				
White/Caucasian	0.60+	0.33	-0.06	0.17
Relationship Duration	0.07	0.05	0.03	0.03
Marital status	0.69	0.47	-0.51*	0.24
Time-variant control variables				
Income Phase 1	0.00**	0.00	-	-
Income Phase 2	0.00*	0.00	-	-
Income Phase 4	0.00*	0.00	-	-
N	124			

Notes. Model fit statistics reported in the text on pages 10-11. + $p \leq 0.10$ * $p \leq 0.05$, ** $p \leq 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table 4. *Structural equation models of the association between the reasons for cohabitation and relationship quality: Fathers*

	Relationship Quality			
	Intercept (α)		Slope (β)	
	Un- standardized	S.E.	Un- standardized	S.E.
Intercept	17.62***	1.28	-0.87	0.76
Time-invariant independent variables				
Reasons for Cohabitation				
Testing	-0.14	0.13	-0.21**	0.08
Financial	-0.55***	0.12	0.10	0.07
Convenience	0.40***	0.12	-0.06	0.08
Because of the Baby	0.03	0.13	-0.06	0.08
Planning	0.06	0.08	-0.01	0.05
Time Together	-0.31+	0.19	0.36**	0.11
Time-invariant control variables				
Father's age	-0.06+	0.03	-0.01	0.02
Father's education				
Less than a college degree	0.37	0.31	-0.22	0.19
Father's race/ethnicity				
White/Caucasian	0.09	0.37	-0.12	0.23
Relationship Duration	0.02	0.05	-0.01	0.03
Marital status	0.96*	0.43	0.29	0.26
Time-variant control variables				
Income Phase 1	0.00	0.00	-	-
Income Phase 2	0.00	0.00	-	-
Income Phase 4	0.00	0.00	-	-
N	125			

Notes. Model fit statistics reported in the text on pages 10-11. ⁺ $p \leq 0.10$ * $p \leq 0.05$, ** $p \leq 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Discussion

The objective of the present research was to further previous studies on the reasons for cohabitation and how they affect relationship quality. It had been shown that couples who reported cohabiting to test their relationship had lower satisfaction than couples who cohabited because they wanted to spend more time together or because they were planning on marriage in the future.

In this study, we categorized the couples' given reasons for cohabitation into internal reasons (planning on marriage or wanting to spend more time together) and external reasons (testing, because of the baby, financial, convenience) and hypothesized that respondents whose

primary reason for cohabitation was because of internal reasons would have a firmer base for their relationship than respondents whose primary reason for cohabitation was because of external reasons.

For mothers, we found that internal reasons for cohabitation were associated with a decline in relationship quality across the transition to parenthood, while external reasons for living together appeared to be less associated with relationship quality. We also found that living together due to reasons related to spending more time together or planning on marriage at a later date were associated with less relationship quality. In contrast, mothers who lived together because of the baby declined in relationship quality, but external reasons related to testing, convenience, and finances were not associated with a significant decline.

Similar to mothers, we found that internal reasons for cohabitation were associated with a decline in fathers' relationship quality across the transition to parenthood. Fathers who cohabited in order to spend more time with their partner had lower relationship quality initially, however, their relationships improved over time. Unlike mothers, external reasons were more associated with relationship quality. Fathers who lived together to test the relationship decreased further in relationship quality over time, while fathers who lived together for financial reasons only decreased further initially. In contrast, those who lived together for convenience were actually more satisfied with their relationships initially.

While previous research has shown that the reasons couples choose to cohabit is associated with the quality of their relationship (Rhoades et al., 2009), no previous research has tested how those reasons affect the quality of the relationship across the transition to parenthood. Therefore, the addition of the new baby to these couples' lives should always be considered when interpreting these results. For example, both mothers and fathers who reported wanting to

spend more time together as their reason for moving in together declined in relationship quality initially. This could be because when they moved in together, they thought they were going to have lots of time to spend together, but when their baby came that free time to spend together was no longer there. A similar explanation could be given for mothers who cited planning as their reason for cohabitation. The birth of their child may have put their future relationship plans on hold or even ended them, which would be associated with a lower relationship quality over time.

In terms of the results for convenience, it is possible that fathers who moved in for reasons related to convenience actually liked the idea of making a family with their partner and new baby, and therefore increased in relationship quality initially. It is also possible that these fathers had less far to fall in terms of relationship quality than say fathers who cited wanting to spend more time together as their reason for moving in with their partner.

While previous research has shown that for childless cohabitators more external reasons to live together are negative for relationship quality, and more internal reasons are positive, this study found both reasons may be a weak foundation for new parents' relationships, especially if the baby is unplanned. Previous research on the transition to parenthood overwhelmingly shows that the birth of a baby, especially the first child, is one of the most stressful and challenging times for most couples in terms of their relationship with one other. In this study, both internal and external reasons for cohabitation were at some point associated with a decline in relationship quality across the transition. This could mean that couples who are cohabiting while experiencing one of the biggest stressors in their lives, the birth of a child, may be exacerbating an already tenuous relationship no matter what reason they gave for initially moving in together.

Because cohabiting couples have been shown to be less committed to one another, this extremely stressful experience may result in the dissolution of many couples' relationships.

The major limitations of this study have to do with when the questionnaire was administered to the couples. Most of our cohabiting couples had been living together for quite awhile by the time they participated in our study. Because of this, couples may not accurately remember why they originally decided to cohabit, or their feelings about their cohabiting relationship may have changed since they first decided to move in. Second, the questionnaire is only administered in Phase 4, which is post-birth. Couples' feelings about their relationship can change significantly across the transition to parenthood, and their reasons for staying in the relationship may have changed since the birth of their baby.

Another limitation of the study was that it was not a very representative sample. Of the mothers in the study, 86.5% and 84.3% of fathers reported their race as white. The couples in this study were also not representative in terms of socio-economic status. Those who participated had on average, a higher income and were more highly educated than the overall population of the United States. Therefore their reasons for cohabitation and the way they handle and experience cohabitation in general may be different from those in a lower socio-economic status. The study also excluded those who were not able to read and speak English as well as individuals who did not plan to return to work after childbirth, limiting the pool of eligible couples. Finally, when looking at the results it should be noted that the alphas on the relationship quality scale were low.

For future studies, it would be interesting to compare the change in relationship quality from individual couple to individual couple instead of just all mothers to all fathers. It would be fascinating to see how each partners' answers matched up to each other on the reasons for

cohabitation scale, and then compare that mother's change in relationship quality to her partner's change.

It would also be interesting to be able to follow the cohabiting couples a little while longer and see whether or not couples who cited internal reasons for moving in together stay together longer than couples who chose to live together because of external reasons. Future research might also test if there is a difference in results between couples who are currently cohabiting versus couples who started off cohabiting but are now married.

After looking at all of the analyses we did on internal versus external reasons for cohabitation and how that affects relationship quality, I found that there is not a single reason that couples should consider before moving in together. Living together in order to spend more time together, because of marriage plans or a baby, to test the relationship, or because of financial plans all were at some point associated with less relationship quality initially or over time. Therefore, I would advise couples who are thinking about moving in together to have a conversation about multiple issues prior to moving in together and carefully consider their own motivations. This may help couples avoid a decline in relationship quality that stems from holding unrealistic expectations for their partner, themselves, or their relationship.

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Appendix: Reasons for Cohabitation Scale

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Please answer the following questions regarding your relationship with your partner. If a question is not applicable to your relationship, please circle N/A.

I first moved in with my partner.....

1.) because we were already committed as a couple and didn't need to prove it with a marriage.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree			Neither Agree nor Disagree			Strongly Agree

2.) because we were ready for the commitment of living together, but didn't feel the need to get married.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree			Neither Agree nor Disagree			Strongly Agree

3.) so that we could have more daily intimacy and sharing.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree			Neither Agree nor Disagree			Strongly Agree

4.) because we got engaged.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree			Neither Agree nor Disagree			Strongly Agree

5.) because we didn't have enough money to get married.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree			Neither Agree nor Disagree			Strongly Agree

6.) because my lease was up.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
---	---	---	---	---	---	---

Strongly
DisagreeNeither
Agree nor
DisagreeStrongly
Agree

7.) because I knew I wanted to spend the rest of my life with him/her.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree			Neither Agree nor Disagree			Strongly Agree

8.) because we were too young to get married.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree			Neither Agree nor Disagree			Strongly Agree

9.) because I wanted to make sure we were compatible before deciding about marriage.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree			Neither Agree nor Disagree			Strongly Agree

10.) because we were pregnant.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree			Neither Agree nor Disagree			Strongly Agree

11.) because I had concerns about whether I wanted to be with my partner long-term.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree			Neither Agree nor Disagree			Strongly Agree

12.) because many of our friends were living together.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree			Neither Agree nor Disagree			Strongly Agree

13.) to share household expenses.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree			Neither Agree nor Disagree			Strongly Agree

14.) because it's the only way we would know if we were/are ready to get married.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree			Neither Agree nor Disagree			Strongly Agree

15.) because we didn't need a wedding to prove we were committed to one another.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree			Neither Agree nor Disagree			Strongly Agree

16.) to get to know him/her better before deciding about marriage.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree			Neither Agree nor Disagree			Strongly Agree

17.) because our families supported the idea.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree			Neither Agree nor Disagree			Strongly Agree

18.) because we spent most nights together anyway.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree			Neither Agree nor Disagree			Strongly Agree

19.) because I could not afford rent on my own.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
---	---	---	---	---	---	---

Strongly
DisagreeNeither
Agree nor
Disagree

Strongly Agree

20.) because with the costs of having and raising a baby it made sense.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree			Neither Agree nor Disagree			Strongly Agree

21.) because it was inconvenient to have some of my stuff at my place and some at my partner's.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree			Neither Agree nor Disagree			Strongly Agree

22.) because I wanted to know more about what my partner does when I am not around.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree			Neither Agree nor Disagree			Strongly Agree

23.) because I wanted to spend more time with him/her.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree			Neither Agree nor Disagree			Strongly Agree

24.) because we both wanted to live with the baby.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree			Neither Agree nor Disagree			Strongly Agree

25.) because it was convenient.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree			Neither Agree nor Disagree			Strongly Agree

26.) because neither of us felt the need/ or planned to ever get married.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree			Neither Agree nor Disagree			Strongly Agree

27.) because it made sense financially.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree			Neither Agree nor Disagree			Strongly Agree

28.) because neither of us wanted to care for the baby alone.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree			Neither Agree nor Disagree			Strongly Agree

29.) because I wanted to make sure we both contribute to running the household.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree			Neither Agree nor Disagree			Strongly Agree

30.) to improve our sex life together.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree			Neither Agree nor Disagree			Strongly Agree

31.) because no religious beliefs hindered my decision to live with my partner.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree			Neither Agree nor Disagree			Strongly Agree

32.) because we want to have another baby.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly			Neither Agree nor			Strongly

Disagree

Disagree

Agree

33.) because I thought it would bring us closer together.

1
Strongly
Disagree

2

3

4
Neither
Agree nor
Disagree

5

6

7
Strongly
Agree

34.) because we didn't have enough time together when we lived in separate places.

1
Strongly
Disagree

2

3

4
Neither
Agree nor
Disagree

5

6

7
Strongly
Agree

35.) because I didn't want to get divorced in the future.

1
Strongly
Disagree

2

3

4
Neither
Agree nor
Disagree

5

6

7
Strongly
Agree

36.) because I had doubts about us making it for the long haul.

1
Strongly
Disagree

2

3

4
Neither
Agree nor
Disagree

5

6

7
Strongly
Agree

37.) because we were going to get married.

1
Strongly
Disagree

2

3

4
Neither
Agree nor
Disagree

5

6

7
Strongly
Agree

38.) because if I lived with my partner it would be easier to check up on him/her.

1
Strongly
Disagree

2

3

4
Neither
Agree nor
Disagree

5

6

7
Strongly
Agree